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VII.—*Journal of a Three Years' Residence in Abyssinia, in furtherance of the Objects of the Church Missionary Society.* By the Rev. Samuel Gobat. London; 1834. 12mo. pp. 371.

This work is another contribution by the Missionary Societies to our knowledge of the social condition of distant countries; and although it contains no numerical statements, and little besides to the purpose of the mere geographer, yet our intercourse with Abyssinia is too limited to allow us to pass it without some remark. It is the moral aspect of the country which has chiefly attracted Mr. Gobat's notice; and though still a painful subject of contemplation, it is somewhat less so in his hands than in those of his predecessors. The general outline of restlessness and sensuality remains untouched; but with it he seems to have found mixed up much patience under rebuke and expostulation,—much individual gentleness of character,—and, above all, perhaps, much curiosity regarding the opinions of others, and respect, in particular, for those of the missionaries. This last, it is true, seems to have been evidenced in Mr. Gobat's case, chiefly by engaging him in theological discussions, and courting his decision on nice points of faith and opinion; but its effects would not be confined to these, if scope were afforded to its more extended influence.

It is a curious question in anthropology, whence arise the comparative gentleness and tolerance usually, though not universally, found among Pagans and Christians, who occupy the extremes in social existence; and the fierce intolerance of the followers of Mahomet, who may be considered as standing between both. The answer is not immediately obvious; nor could it be considered adequate unless it met, and in some degree reconciled, even the apparent exceptions to the observation. But it would be an important contribution to anthropography, and by so much to geography, if it accomplished this task.

The curse of Abyssinia seems to be its weak and unsettled government; and the following passage so strikingly illustrates this, that it may be considered an essential preliminary to Mr. Gobat's further statements regarding the character and manners of its inhabitants.

"At the time of Mr. Bruce, the kings were possessed of a little power, and, at the time of Mr. Salt, they yet had some appearance of it; but since the death of the Ras Googsa, about ten years since, they have had nothing but the title of king. They would have lost even this, were it not that the governors stand in need of it, to support that of Ras; for a dejasmat cannot take the title of Ras, lawfully, unless he has placed a new king on the throne.

"At the time of Mr. Salt, the reigning king was Gooaloo, who reigned seventeen years; and after him, Joas, for four years. Then the dejasmat of Semen, Heila Mariam, placed Beda Mariam upon the

throne; but he could not sustain him. He reigned only three or four days; being displaced by Eemam; and succeeded by Guigar, who had the title of king eight years. After the death of Mariam, Guigar was dethroned; and succeeded by another Joas, who, one year after, was obliged to cede the throne to Guebra Christos; and he, it is said, died in consequence of poison being administered to him by order of the old king, Guebra. I do not know whether there be at present a king or not. The imprisonment of the male members of the royal family, of which Mr. Bruce speaks in detail, is no longer considered as necessary. All the members of that family are dispersed in the various provinces, and live partly on what the grandees are pleased to give them, and partly by their own industry. They are, however, generally beloved and esteemed by the people, who, being incapable of forming to themselves any higher idea, have no other hope for the future than to see this royal family restored, and to enjoy the fruits of such a restoration.

"The most important men, who have governed the interior since the time of Mr. Salt, are, the Ras Googsa, whose death is still regretted, on account of his justice and peaceable disposition; and his three sons—Eemam, beloved, like his father, of the whole nation, and who governed three years; Mariam, hated by all, except his soldiers, who governed three years; and Dori, who governed only three months. The present governor is the grandson of Googsa, by a daughter; who has assumed the title of Ras Ali, and with whom the people are much satisfied. The Dejasmat Maroo, son-in-law to Googsa, during some years goverued, with mingled justice and cruelty, the provinces of Dembea, Kovara, and Agow; but his only son has not been able to succeed him. The Ras of the family of Googsa has given the government of Dembea and Kovara to his nephew, the Dejasmat Comfoo, whom I saw at Gondar. In Samen, the Ras Gabriel governed at the time of Mr. Salt. His son and successor, Hula Mariam, is still regretted throughout Abyssinia, and especially by the people whom he governed. It is seven years since he died; and his son Oubea succeeded him without difficulty, and has kept Walcaït, which his father had subdued. For the last forty years there has been, comparatively, but little war on the other side of the Tacazze; and the country has been miserable only during the three years of Mariam's government. Tigré, on the contrary, has been in a state of trouble and anarchy ever since the death of the Ras Walda Selasse, in 1815 or 1816, excepting during the seven or eight years of the government of Sebagadis.

"Shoa is entirely separated from the rest of Abyssinia, in all its agitations. The actual king, Sehla Selasse, the seventh of the same family, aged thirty-three years, has already reigned eighteen years, to the satisfaction of his people, who are very proud of him. During the last few years he has much extended the frontier of his kingdom to the south and the west. The provinces of the Gallas which he has subdued have generally embraced the Christianity of Abyssinia."

Mr. Gobat did not penetrate to this last favoured portion of the country; but experienced the full inconvenience attending the

dissensions in the remainder. His residence was chiefly in Adowah (the capital of Tigré) and Gondar, to which he penetrated by a new road, making thus a small addition to our previous itineraries of the country. The chiefs of both cities were his friends; but just before his departure one of them defeated the other, and beheaded him; and almost the concluding portion of the narrative records the moderation of the victor, in granting about half the father's dominions to his family.

With these brief notices of modern Abyssinian history, we proceed now to extract the most important statements which we elsewhere find in Mr. Gobat's volume, regarding the political institutions,—religious divisions,—and moral state of the country.

I. "The independent governors are absolute in every respect; it is, therefore, difficult to say anything of their politics. They are at liberty to give the government of a district to, or to take it from, their inferiors, according to their pleasure: they generally find, however, that it is their interest to support the hereditary system, in the government of various districts. The Abyssinian governors have never, up to this time, thought of introducing the least amelioration into their country; with the exception of Sebagadis, who did not know how to begin it. Their chief object is to aggrandize themselves, without thinking what may become of their children after them. When they see themselves near their end, they endeavour to transmit their authority to one of their children, the son of their favourite wife; but he, being in general younger, and having less experience than his brothers, scarcely ever succeeds.

"Jurisprudence is very simple in Abyssinia. There are no advocates (lawyers). If any one has a complaint against another, he will rise before day-break, in order to go and cry before the house of the governor of his district, till he hears him. Then the accused person is summoned, who has a right to defend himself. The accuser and the accused put questions to each other alternately. The judge hears their reasons; summons the witnesses, if there are any; and, after the report of two or more, or, for want of witnesses, after taking an oath from the accused, he decides. In order to prevent noise, the judge orders both parties to speak separately, and appoints a pecuniary fine to be paid by him who interrupts the speech of his adversary; and thus he keeps a kind of order. If one of them should utter serious things or falsehoods, the other asks, by signs, permission to speak; and the judge, giving it, imposes silence upon the first. The sub-governors being easily corrupted by bribes, all the important cases are presented to the governor-general, or *Dejasmat*, who usually gives himself much trouble to discover the truth; and then he frequently summons a learned man, with their code of civil laws, called *Fetha-Negest*, the origin of which they attribute to Constantine. He often decides the punishment according to that rigorous code. The dejasmats, however, are at liberty to decide arbitrarily, in all cases: they frequently mitigate the punishment prescribed by the Fetha-Negest: in general, they are much less severe than the

kings were, when they had power. A thief, for instance, was flogged for a first offence; for a second, he had his right hand cut off; for the third, he was killed: but now they flog him several times, before they cut off his limbs or kill him. No judge has the power to decide the fate of a murderer (except the person killed be a stranger, when the dejasmat considers himself as related to him): this is left to the will of the relations of the person whom he has killed; the judge having only a right to propose a ransom instead of death, and to exhort the relations to accept it; but he may not compel. The price for a man is two hundred and fifty dollars. When a man kills one of his own relations there is no punishment for him. They never pass the Tacazze, from either side, to pursue a murderer. When the relations of a murdered man are not known, as is the case in war, the priests take, in some way, the place of the avenger of blood, by refusing the sacrament to a murderer until he pays the price of blood, or two hundred and fifty dollars to the church.

"Formerly, all important cases were brought before the king and his twelve *leecs*. (The leecs composed a kind of ministry, being both chosen and dismissed by the king, who, in his turn, could do nothing without them.) They alone had the right to judge in criminal matters; but at present they preserve nothing but the title, and the right to judge, in some particular cases, at Gondar only."

II. "The religions of Abyssinia are Christianity, Islamism, and Judaism; to which may be added two separate people—the Camaountes and the Zalâne."

The Christians of Abyssinia are deeply sunk in superstition, and much given to theological discussion. They are divided into three parties, so inimical to each other that they will not take the sacrament together:—the points of division being the nature, extent, and incidences connected with the union of the divine and human natures in the person of the Saviour. They baptize their male children after forty days, and their female after eighty; believing that these periods mark the periods when Adam and Eve respectively received the Holy Spirit. They do not baptize with water only, but with a *merom*, as the Greeks. After baptism, an infant has a new dress put on, and receives also the communion. Marriages are performed with great simplicity, and are as easily dissolved; but after a third divorce, men can neither contract another regular marriage, nor receive the sacrament, unless they become monks. In such cases, accordingly, they usually reconcile themselves to one of their previous wives. The Abyssinian Christians do not believe in a separate purgatory, but conceive that the souls of all men go to hell, from which those that are to be saved are specially delivered by the Archangel Michael. They attach great importance to fasting; and have preserved many Jewish customs, as circumcision, ceremonial uncleannesses, abstaining from forbidden meats, &c.

"The Mahomedans appear to have multiplied in Abyssinia since the time of Bruce. The places where they are in greatest number are Adowah and its vicinity; Hawasa, and the vicinity of the mountain Toloca in Samen, where the Jews were formerly independent; Derecta, in the province of Begameder; and Gondar. They live pretty well with the Christians; but it is only by their hypocrisy that they support each other, among themselves. They have sometimes friends of their own creed; but wherever friendship requires confidence, they seek it among the Christians. They have no greater subject of discontent than to see themselves placed under a Mussulman; although they will greatly rejoice when they hear that a man of their creed is in authority in another country. The Mussulmans have seldom vast districts to govern, but have almost all the custom-houses; for they use the merchants very ill, in order to give more presents to the Dejasmats than the Christian customers, who are more conscientious, can do. They generally engage much more in trade than the Christians; therefore they have more money. They alone have the traffic of slaves, the Christians never taking any part in it. There is nothing to say of their religion itself, for there are very few possessing the least knowledge of the Korân; and, provided they feed and clothe their sheiks or focaras, these do not care about teaching them anything else than some favourite expressions of the Korân, to flatter themselves in condemning others; but all of them are very zealous to make proselytes. When the Mussulmans of Abyssinia go to foreign countries, they learn to pray; and pray regularly five times a day, and observe the fast of Ramadan much more strictly than the Arabs: but after their return to their own country, they generally forget their prayers, and do not care much for the Ramadan. Like the Christians and Jews, the Mussulmans of Abyssinia never eat the meat of an animal not killed by a man of their own sect. In morality, they are in every respect inferior to the Christians.

"The Falashas or Jews live so retired, and are so separated from the Christians, that the latter know scarcely anything either of their doctrines or of their manners. They live chiefly in the neighbourhood of Gondar and Shelga, and to the north-west of the Lake Tsana. I have done all I could to procure information concerning them; but have been able to ascertain one thing only; viz. that they are much more ignorant than the Christians. Those whom I have seen always used to send me to one of their learned men, when I proposed any question to them. They do not know of what tribe they are; nor have they any adequate idea as to the period when their ancestors settled in Abyssinia. Some say that it was with Menilec, the son of Solomon: others believe that they settled in Abyssinia after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. They have, on the whole, the same superstitions as the Christians: they are only a little modified, after a Jewish fashion. I have never observed that they took the least interest in the idea of the Messiah; and when I examined them on this subject, they coldly replied, that they expected him in the character of a great conqueror, called Theodoros, who must soon

appear, and whom the Christians also expect; but the poor Falashas do not know whether he will be a Christian or a Jew. What they have in common with other Jews is, hatred to Christ. They have a dialect among themselves, which has no similarity either with the Hebrew or with the Ethiopic; but all of them, except some females, speak Amharic. I have seen but one book in the Falasha dialect, written in the Ethiopic character: they told me that it was a book of prayers. In fact, they must be very ignorant, having no books except in the Ethiopic language, and being surrounded with innumerable difficulties, which prevent them from learning that language. I have, however, seen some individuals who know pretty well the contents of the Books of Moses. They read the Psalms, with all the repetitions of 'In the name of the Father, the Son,' &c. which the Christians have added to them, as well as the Songs of Mary and Simeon; but they do not join to them the Oodassé Mariam of Ephrem. They are much more laborious than the other Abyssinians: the building of all the houses of Gondar is their work. They do not allow the Christians to enter their houses, except by force; nor do the latter desire to enter them, for fear of their supernatural influence. All of them are considered as boudas or sorcerers, as also are the artificers in iron and many others. The Falashas, after having spoken with Christians, never enter their own houses without first washing their bodies and changing their dress. All the provisions they buy in the market are washed by them before they make use of them. Their intercourse with the Mahomedans is a little more free than with the Christians. They never carry arms, either for attack or defence. They maintain their own poor, and will not suffer them to beg.

"The Camaountes are a people few in number, inhabiting the mountains about Gondar. Their principal occupation is agriculture; but the women, with immense brass ear-rings, and their ears hanging down to their shoulders, furnish the market of Gondar with wood. I have not been able to go to their villages, finding nobody who would accompany me. I have seen some of them in my house, but could not learn anything of their religion. I believe them to be Deists, satisfied with the idea of the existence of one God, without thinking of the relations He sustains to man—much like the Deists in Europe; and therefore not to be trusted. When they are asked questions in general, and especially with regard to their religion, they always answer in an equivocal manner and in the tone of a buffoon. They nevertheless have a species of priests, and assemble themselves in their own private houses, where they have a repast, which they call 'corban,' communion or eucharist. They are afraid of sorcerers too, but they are not considered as such. They eat meat with the Christians and Mahomedans, provided the animal has not been killed on a Saturday; but they never eat fish.

"The Zalânes are a migratory people, wandering about, with their herds, in the fertile but uncultivated environs of the Lake Tsana, or the Lake Dembea. I have seen but three or four of them: all were very tall, and robust. They are said to believe in the existence of

one God, but to have no other religion. I am inclined to suppose that ignorance has prevailed among them to such a degree as to separate them from the Christians entirely, though their ancestors may have been Christians, which the other Abyssinians will not admit. They do not fight, except for the purpose of defending themselves; and this they do with large sticks, which they handle so skilfully, that no one dares to attack them, either with the lance or the sword."

"III. The principal cause of the corruption of manners in Abyssinia is, after their mental errors, their unsettled mode of living. A Governor, for instance, does not like to remain long at the same place, even when there is no war. He resides sometimes at one end of the province which he governs, and sometimes at the other, with a great number of officers and servants. His first wife is frequently obliged to remain in the house to which he has taken her; and he, not willing to live alone, takes a concubine. Thus the first sin being committed, he continues to add others to the number, until he has lost every feeling of conjugal duty. Those who are with him are in the same situation, and do the same things. Several women being in this manner attached to one man, who is not their husband, and seeing themselves neglected, endeavour on their part to corrupt young men, whose situation should maintain them in innocence; and thus immorality is communicated to all the branches of society. Nevertheless, openly they maintain much more decency than one would be led to suppose, after having read the description which Bruce gives of an Abyssinian feast. I admit that such a feast may have taken place among the most shameless libertines; but excesses of that kind are not customary, either as to their cruelty or their indecency. I have heard people speak of many things; but I have seen less indecency in the capital of Abyssinia than in the capitals of England, France, and Egypt. In Tigré, with the exception of Adowah and Antalo, the women are much more reserved than in the interior. The ordinary consequence of the immoralities alluded to is sloth; from which results poverty, together with the desire to live, where pride is not offended, in a state of dependence on others: the result of which, again, is envy, craftiness, and falsehood. The Abyssinians are liars, as well as the Arabs; but they have yet a feeling of shame when discovered, which the Arabs have not. The first consequence of falsehood is swearing. Another series of vices, which also result from illicit connexions (for so I call the polygamy of the Abyssinians, as they know very well that it is unlawful), is to be found in the circumstance, that the children of one and the same father, who are not of the same mother, are always enemies to each other, in such a degree, that they cannot endure to see one another; nor have they any feeling of filial love for their father, inasmuch as he generally has a fatherly affection only for the children born of a favourite wife: not to mention their jealousies, and the consequences thereof; which go so far, that an adulterer is often killed by his rival. This inconstancy in the intercourse of the sexes with each other may be observed during the whole life of a man. It is this that renders the Abyssinians so light-

minded, having nothing constant but inconstancy itself; although the children show less of levity than the children of other countries.

"It affords me great satisfaction to be able to remark—but almost solely with reference to the Christians—that in the midst of the chaos of corruption in this country there are some traces of goodness, which, like precious stones, have remained dispersed among the moral ruins of Abyssinia. A traveller, for instance, is never at a loss to find a lodging; when he arrives in the evening at a village, he seldom needs to ask for a lodging, the first person who sees him invites him to lodge at his house, where he may be as much at his ease as if at home, and assured that, were he laden with gold, his host would not touch the least thing. The Abyssinian traveller, on his part, unwilling to impose on the kindness of his host, spares his own provisions only when he is, as it were, forced to do so. I do not speak here of villages on those roads which are much frequented by caravans, and where the people learn too easily the colder manners of strangers. Formerly the Abyssinians had much respect and attachment for the White people, and in the interior this is the case still; but in Tigré, White people are often despised. The reason of this is, that the people of Tigré see much more of the White people than those in the interior; and have but too many occasions to observe, that in point of morals they are not superior to themselves, when they are in the same circumstances. Nevertheless, even in Tigré, I have never wanted a lodging when I have arrived in the evening: the people of the village frequently brought the best things they had, for the supper of myself and servants.

"I have mentioned elsewhere, that the Abyssinians are robbers; but, with the exception of the neighbourhood of the Shohos, where I then was, they are robbers only in one sense. This is in times of anarchy, when every chief of a district assumes independence, with the intention of bringing the neighbouring districts under his power; for which object he wants money, which he can only obtain by giving to his subjects liberty to pillage the strangers, and, if they can, the neighbouring districts. They look upon pillage, in this sense, as a right of war; and it is in this respect that all of them are robbers. The interference of a governor or dejasmat prevents all this. There are many who endeavour to cheat in the market; but because thieves are punished severely, general disgrace is connected with stealing, which therefore is, comparatively, seldom committed; and it is generally easy to get the stolen articles back again. Once, for instance, I was in the camp of Walda Michael, when a man complained that he had been robbed, without his knowing the thief. Immediately after, a priest was sent for, in order to pronounce an anathema upon the thief; who, at the end of a quarter of an hour, sent the stolen article back, without making himself known. Thus they can nearly always effect the return of stolen articles; but in this case they do not inquire for the thief, lest the fear of punishment should render the anathema without effect. The servants are generally more faithful than in Europe. Even a thief by profession would not rob his master's

house; and should this very rare case happen, the servant would put himself in such a situation as never to be met with again by his master. If there are any exceptions, they are that the female servants take small things secretly to eat. The Abyssinians punish their children severely only when they have stolen. I have seen a mother, usually of a very meek temper, and who would not see a man cause suffering to the smallest reptile, burn the skin off both the hands and lips of her daughter, only nine years of age, for having put her finger into a mug of honey.

"Though I have heard of some acts of cruelty, still I must say, that in general the Abyssinians are not cruel. In war they scarcely ever kill a man whom they take prisoner; and when they see that victory is theirs, they prefer making great circuits in order to take prisoners, rather than killing those who still defend themselves before them. The cases in which they are cruel occur in the wounded of the opposite party; they let them languish, and miserably perish, when a little care would probably save their lives. Nor are they cruel to animals; and therefore I can scarcely believe what Bruce says concerning their cruelty in this respect: and whenever I have asked the Abyssinians whether it happens sometimes that people cut off a piece of flesh from a living animal to eat it, they have always manifested horror at it. But having myself experienced what extreme hunger is, I believe the possibility of any act a man is capable of devising, in order to procure necessary food. If there are cases of cruelty, such as Bruce reports, they certainly are exceptions; and particular cases of that kind are not wanting in Europe. I have seen parents chastise their children for having plucked out feathers from a fowl which was not dead, although they were going to kill it.

"Toward the poor the Abyssinians are very charitable. Their motives may not always be the purest; but God only knows these thoroughly, it belongs not to me to judge. When at Gondar, in the time of dearth, I have known persons of fortune who entertained about sixty maimed persons; and, in fact, when the Abyssinians have it in their power, they never send a beggar away without giving him something; they sometimes give beyond their means, for they will frequently suffer hunger in order to share the little they have with those who are still more miserable. In good seasons, therefore, there are but few beggars. The beggars almost always ask alms in the name of the saint of the day; and, having eighteen festivals, or days of idleness, every month, there is always some variety.

"The Abyssinians are very easily provoked to anger; but they are as easily reconciled to each other. In Tigré, they sometimes beat each other in their disputes; but in the country of Amhara this scarcely ever takes place, for there the man who has beaten must pay a fine, proportionate partly to the offence and partly to his means; half of which is for him who has been beaten, unless he has also struck, in which case both are fined. Sometimes they are seen to insult each other in such a manner that one would expect they would never be reconciled again, and yet at the end of a quarter of

an hour, they are often good friends again. Excepting the petty governors, who are jealous of the advantages of their equals, and of those who are a little superior to them, there are scarcely any who keep up implacable hatred. The grandees pardon their inferiors easily when they ask for pardon. For the reconciliation of two parties, there must always be a mediator; sometimes it is one of the parties that request him to exercise his function; this is the case particularly when discords between husband and wife are to be settled. After having arranged between themselves, one of them, generally the most culpable, puts a large stone upon his neck, and, approaching the other, asks for pardon: the other, in saying to him 'May God forgive you!' takes the stone and puts it on his own neck, in order to ask pardon of the first; who, on forgiving him, takes the stone and puts it again in its place. A master, however, seldom puts the stone on his own neck; he contents himself, on forgiving his servant, with taking the stone from his neck and putting it into his hands. They carry also a stone to an offended person, even if no dispute has taken place. One day, two of my servants, after having sought in vain, till ten o'clock in the evening, for a sheep they had lost, came to me, creeping on their hands and knees, each with a stone of about eighty pounds weight on his neck, to request me to beat them severely, as a proof that I forgave them, as a father forgives his children after having chastised them. The stone they carry is generally a mill-stone. The rarest thing in Abyssinia is for the relatives of a man who has been killed to forgive the murderer; and when they do not agree upon a pecuniary fine, they make use of the same arms with which he has killed their relative to kill him: so that if he had killed a man with his hands, they would kill him with their hands also."

We are happy to find that Mr. Gobat bears honourable testimony to the character left by Mr. Bruce in Abyssinia: many other things we leave behind to reward those who will examine for themselves a moderately-sized volume, regarding an interesting country, from the entry of the missionaries into which we may reasonably augur that, at no distant period, its population will become both more intelligent and better known. A valuable contribution to the Physical Geography at least of its Northern Provinces may, we believe, be shortly expected from Dr. Ruppell.